Department of Human Services

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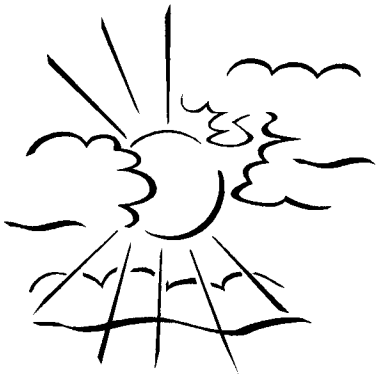

*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips
Monday, July 11, 2005

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State may slash work study jobs

Legislators propose cutting $15 million in aid for college students in budget tug-of-war.

July 11, 2005

By Doug Guthrie / The Detroit News

Financial aid for thousands of Michigan college students is at risk as state lawmakers consider slashing nearly $15 million in funding for those least able to afford to go to college.

Work-study jobs for students, need-based grants such as the Michigan Education Opportunity Grant and Part-Time Independent Student program are proposed to be eliminated in the state's 2006 budget. Also, a host of initiatives designed to help minority students through the state's Martin Luther King-Cesar Chavez-Rosa Parks program are threatened in a politically charged budget negotiation on how to fund higher education.

Many students who have relied on the state-supported programs are concerned the proposed cuts would make college inaccessible.

Tayneata Starr-Thomas, 18, said she wouldn't be a freshman at Wayne State University if not for its King-Chavez-Parks outreach program.

It prepared her for college while she was a student at Detroit's Nolan Middle School.

"They helped me fill out financial aid applications earlier in my junior year so I had the best chance of getting help. I got a scholarship, too," Starr-Thomas said. "They gave me tools about how to approach college. Without KCP, a lot of students won't make it to college. They just won't know how."

Educators say the cuts would limit options for many students at a time when colleges themselves face reduced funding and are considering tuition increases. Michigan Technological and Grand Valley State universities both have raised tuition nearly 8 percent for the fall. The state's other public universities also are considering tuition hikes along with service reduction and decreased class offerings.

"Our universities are in such a bind right now," said Dan Hurley, spokesman for the Presidents Council, which represents the leaders of the state's public universities. "Two hundred and eighty-five thousand students are marching toward the campuses of our public universities in the coming weeks, and they don't know how to fill out the balance sheets that say what they will owe and what they can get in aid."

The cuts also come as universities have been challenged to increase the number of graduates to rebuild the state's changing economy and work force. Educators say cutting aid programs would be counterproductive.

"It is in the state's best interest to get more students into the pipeline moving toward graduation," Hurley said. "The last thing we need is any impediment. It is all about investing in the future, and our state leaders need to put together a plan to do that."

Response to governor

The aid cuts were included in the House budget as bargaining points to oppose proposals Gov. Jennifer Granholm made in her version of the budget, said Rep. John Stewart, R-Plymouth, chairman of the House Appropriations higher education subcommittee.

Granholm wants to eliminate state tuition grants to students attending private colleges, something the House and Senate oppose. Almost 45 percent of the state's $60.5 million in tuition grants goes to students at private colleges.

Legislative leaders also object to the governor's suggestion that the Michigan Merit Scholarship should be converted to an incentive paid on college degree completion rather than to high-performing high school seniors.

Meanwhile, the House has forwarded a controversial plan to reformulate funding of all public universities. The plan seeks to level the uneven amount of per-student funding that has gone to the universities for years. Some schools, like Grand Valley State University, would receive large increases while others, like Wayne State University, would see decreases.

"Am I interested in cutting those (aid) programs? No," Stewart said. "I'm calling the governor out. I want her to tell us where the money is going to come from."

Sen. Mike Goschka, R-Brant, chairman of the state Senate's Education Subcommittee, also said he expects to see the aid programs restored but not until after the governor concedes on other issues.

"It is tough to negotiate, especially when you don't have a lot of money," Goschka said. "I think John Stewart said it best when he said the House felt they needed some bargaining chips."

Greg Bird, spokesman for the governor's budget office, said, "Given our financial situation, Representative Stewart is right: We do have to make some tough decisions. But programs such as Michigan work-study and King-Chavez-Parks are a higher priority to us. It's evident that there are those in the Legislature who feel that way, too, and we will have to work out this situation."

Cuts reach across the board

Eliminating the state's $2.69 million King-Chavez-Parks program would end outreach programs at all 15 public universities that influence about 18,000 high school and middle school students every year. With about $145,000 in King-Chavez-Parks funding, Wayne State's College Day program has annually given about 3,000 underprivileged Detroit-area youths a day at the university as well as workshops to teach essential college study skills and time management.

"The proposed cuts would devastate the program and the chance at college for many young people," said Henry Robinson, director of college enrichment services at Wayne State. "These are children who might not even consider college without this encouragement."

The University of Michigan and Michigan State University students have received notices from the colleges about the grants and financial aid they qualify to receive in the fall using only federal and institution funding sources. Some work-study programs have been continued based on limited federal funds. Revised statements will be sent later, after college tuition rates are finalized and if state aid is restored.

"If I don't get work-study, I'll be eating nothing but macaroni and cheese next winter," said Josh Kersey, 20, a University of Michigan junior studying philosophy and political science and getting about $8 an hour to work 12 hours a week as a secretary in the university's student government office. In Kersey's personal budget, his $2,500 work-study grant is for food.

Ron Kent, Wayne State's director of work-study placement, said employers can pay as little as 25 percent of a work-study student's wages while the aid program picks up the rest.

"The loss of work-study will have a dramatic negative impact on our students, but also on the many university departments and nonprofits that benefit from hiring subsidized workers," Kent said.

"With more cuts likely on campus, I'm not sure how some of the departments will be able to afford to get some jobs done. In so many ways, this will impact the institution. This may not be apparent to the Legislature."

Preparing for fall classes, universities and their students are forced to consider the threat of the program eliminations while the budget process drags on. Negotiations are expected to result in last-minute resolutions to beat the Oct. 1 budget deadline.

Leslie Marlowe, 26, knows how helpful these programs are and hopes they'll continue. The Warren resident, who graduated from Wayne State University in December, was able to get through college with help from a work-study program, which allowed her to take a job on campus.

"Without work-study, I would have had to have a job off campus, and that would have made it harder to go to school," she said.

You can reach Doug Guthrie at (313) 222-2359 or dguthrie@ detnews.com.

College aid at risk

The Michigan House of Representative has proposed eliminating $15 million in aid programs to the state's neediest students:

• Michigan Work Study: $7 million

Provides part-time jobs to help needy undergraduate students. The jobs usually are on campus, and employers work to accommodate the student's schedule. Many colleges also have agreements with off-campus employers, like nonprofit organizations. Award amounts vary based on need. Most colleges see work-study as a way to help students limit the number of hours they work and avoid distractions from academics.

• Part-time Independent Student Program: $3 million

Provides need-based grants of up to $600 a year to part-time public university students.

• Michigan Education Opportunity Grants: $2 million

Assists needy undergraduates who are enrolled at least half-time at community colleges or public universities.

• King/Chavez/Park program: $3 million

This outreach program helps minority students prepare for college.

Source: Michigan House Fiscal Agency

On the Net

http://www.macrao.org/**The Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers** is a good place to start your hunt for in-state schools. It links to Michigan's public and private colleges, their home pages, contact information and online applications.

http:// www.nacac.com/**The National Association for College Admissions Counseling** lists college fair schedules and other helpful information. A student section features a list of online resources for such topics as financial aid, college admissions testing, student athletes, special needs students, study skills and a general list of colleges and universities.

www.nacac.com/pubs_p&s.html**Download free student and parent college guides and publications** from NACAC.

Paying for College: Michigan student aid

American Council on Education

Education Department student aid portal

Financial aid tips

Factor in loans, grants and scholarships into your financial planning. Remember the deadlines and plan ahead.

See if your child qualifies for a work/study program.

Starting off at a community college can reduce costs.

Consider applying for a four-year U.S. Army ROTC or other military scholarship.

Tobacco dollars

Lansing should borrow funds for job growth only

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Sunday, July 10, 2005

Grabbing an early payout of tobacco settlement dollars might be prudent for Michigan, as long as Lansing politicians invest the money to create jobs and don't waste it on routine needs.

The latter is a distinct danger as the administration and lawmakers dicker privately over next year's budget, including an intriguing plan from Republican House members to raise up to $3 billion for economic development and other uses by selling the rights to future tobacco company payments.

That money, which all states share because of a 1999 legal deal, is like a lottery prize that should be nurtured into something larger and lasting. Unfortunately, budget and political considerations threaten to siphon away much of it for uses without a long-term payoff.

Of all of the bad ideas suggested, nothing is worse than a plan to put $500 million into the Medicaid Trust Fund - a Band-Aid solution for an ailment requiring major surgery.

The underfunding of Medicaid, the health insurance program for the poor, is a structural budget problem requiring a different and permanent fix, ideally with both federal and state participation. While hospitals and doctors could use this funding, it would leave Michigan no better off economically, which is the goal Lansing must aim for.

For that reason, we're also troubled by another GOP idea to set aside $1.5 billion for college scholarships - the Michigan Merit Award program already funded with these tobacco dollars. While we supported the scholarships for qualifying high school students initially, that was at a time when government coffers were full and the state's economy was healthier. Though Michigan needs more college graduates, and the awards can play a role, this seems to be a huge diversion of a temporary windfall better spent investing in cutting-edge fields.

As it is, borrowing the tobacco money is an expensive way to raise cash. Critics predict it would yield only 40 cents on the dollar because of higher interest rates than those paid when simply bonding. Indeed, a $2-billion bonding program is what Gov. Jennifer Granholm had proposed for job-related investment, until tentatively accepting the Republicans' plan.

What's best about the tobacco proposal is voters wouldn't need to approve it. What makes us nervous is how the dollars would be spent. Free-market advocates argue governments are ill-equipped to make such economic choices even if politics can be minimized.

Regardless of that concern, however, Michigan just can't sit by while states such as California assemble pots of investment dollars to improve their economies. While low taxes and efficient government create part of the right climate for business growth, experience shows other lures are needed. Therefore, the proposed development fund is an essential tool.

Fortunately, Democrat Granholm and Republican legislators agree on this strategy and apparently are of one mind to tap the tobacco money to carry it out. But the spending details are all important. Proposals, no matter how noble, that wouldn't brighten Michigan's jobs picture would be best put aside.

Sunday, July 10, 2005

Granholm's birth control plan makes sense

Program would seek additional federal family planning funds

The Detroit News

Editorial

Gov. Jennifer Granholm's program to reduce unwanted pregnancies makes sense. Such a program, if it is effective, would be both humane and cost-effective.

As the governor noted, the state spends $286 million a year on Medicaid coverage for births and follow-up infant care. Medicaid is the joint state-federal health insurance program for the poor. State health officials estimate that there are 26,000 unintended pregnancies annually that are paid for by Medicare.

The governor noted that a 10 percent reduction in this number of pregnancies would yield a savings of $27 million a year.

More important, a reduction in the number of unwanted pregnancies could also result in less child abuse. There would be fewer abortions as well, and abortion remains a point of bitter contention among Michigan residents.

The governor proposes a series of seminars to be held around the state in which health officials and educators will advise parents on how to talk to their middle school children on sexuality issues, abstinence and how to avoid unintended pregnancies.

In addition, the governor proposes seeking a change in federal Medicaid regulations so the state can pay for more family planning services and government-approved contraceptive devices for low-income parents. While Medicaid covers these expenses below the federal poverty line, the governor wants to expand the services to those who make up to almost twice the poverty income. The state's Community Health Department is seeking permission to obtain the funds from the federal government, as have 21 other states.

Certainly, if there is additional money available from the federal government to pay for such a program, the state would be remiss if it didn't seek the funds. Michigan residents earn little enough of a return on their federal tax dollars as it is.

Finally, the governor is urging passage of a state law requiring private health insurance companies to pay for contraception if they provide prescription coverage. This is problematic. Coverage for contraception is a desirable benefit, but using state law to order insurance companies to offer a particular kind of coverage drives up the cost of health insurance for all those employers who aren't self-insured. Ultimately, their employees will pay higher costs as well.

Overall, however, the governor's plan is wise and farsighted.

State pregnancy costs

- Current family planning expenditures: $44.3 million
- Birth and infant care costs: $286 million
- Possible savings from 10 percent reduction in unwanted pregnancies: $27 million

Source: State of Mi

Sunday, July 10, 2005

Right to Life, pro-choice rivals break for lunch

By Laura Berman / The Detroit News

They ate Greek salads, dressing on the side. It was the unlikeliest lunch group in Lansing last Thursday -- or maybe all year.

One guy from Right to Life. Three women on the pro-choice side, from Planned Parenthood, the ACLU, MARAL.

"It wasn't Camp David," said Ed Rivet, who has been an annoyingly effective Right to Life of Michigan lobbyist for 17 years.

And it wasn't exactly a peace conference. But Shelli Weisberg, the ACLU legislative director who sought the lunch, described it as a "huge, huge first step."

Was that wishful thinking?

Many of us wish for some kind of plain talk and sanity in the political discussion about pregnancy, contraception, abstinence -- and even abortion. For too long, though, there's been a war of stale rhetoric.

One side sticks fast to its life-and-dead-babies crusade, bent on stopping abortion and seemingly indifferent to providing women with the tools to prevent pregnancy.

Historically, Right to Life of Michigan has taken no position on contraception -- used by 3 million Michigan women -- but is obsessed with extreme abortion procedures that involve virtually nobody, born or not.

Meanwhile, the other side opts for the sterile language of the laboratory, with phrases like "reproductive rights" and "contraceptive equity," that aren't easy to understand or chant with conviction.

But last week, the winds shifted. The earth -- the Michigan earth -- moved.

On Wednesday, Gov. Jennifer Granholm took a stand for the middle ground of what both sides are now calling "unintended pregnancy."

The governor announced she's seeking a federal waiver that would allow Medicaid to pay for birth control for women who are above the poverty line -- women who would likely sink into poverty if they got pregnant.

She also backed a Senate bill that would require insurers who pay for prescription drugs to pay for oral contraceptives.

They call it "contraceptive equity" because insurers began to pay for Viagra the instant it appeared. Since then, 22 states have adopted similar laws, including Arkansas, Missouri, North Carolina and Nevada.

Similar bills have appeared in the Legislature for at least five years. They would make a pocketbook difference to women -- and theoretically, at least, could save companies the cost of pregnancy, labor and childbirth, at $9,000 or so per child.

In the past, these bills have appeared and disappeared, without ever surfacing for votes. And that's been largely because of the power of the Catholic Conference and Right to Life, neither of which encourages talk -- let alone legislation -- that backs family planning other than the most basic methods. ("My wife and I use natural family planning," said Rivet, the father of six, "and it works perfectly.")

But Rivet sat down with the enemy last week -- and they sat down with him. "It was a breakthrough, definitely," said Rebekkah Warren, who heads MARAL, a pro-choice group. No, Greek salads on Thursday are hardly a Camp David summit. But the idea that both sides could work together, on something, is no longer hopeless. A conversation has begun.

Laura Berman's column runs Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday in Metro. Reach her at (248) 647-7221 or lberman@detnews.com.

Aging juvenile home 'falling apart'

Sunday, July 10, 2005

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Kalamazoo County residents are debating whether to spend millions of dollars to expand the county jail and millions more to staff the larger facility.
They are pondering whether $3.3 million for crime prevention and inmate rehabilitation programs is a wise use of funds.
Few, however, doubt the need for a new county juvenile home.
Even Ray Wilson, steering committee member of the Kalamazoo Taxpayers Association, which typically opposes tax increases, is on board.
"We recognize there is a need for a new juvenile home," Wilson said. "Few people dispute that."
Built 69 years ago as an orphanage, the juvenile home on Gull Road is too small and too decrepit for its present use as a 40-bed detention center for children ages 11 to 17, county officials say.
They are proposing to build a $28 million facility behind the current home. The proposed building would have 64 beds and substantially more classroom space. The current building would be demolished and the land used for parking; the county would purchase a parcel to the east for additional recreational space.
But while construction of a new juvenile home seems to have widespread support, it is paired on the Aug. 2 ballot with a $54 million proposal to expand the jail from 327 to 625 beds. Voters are being asked to raise taxes by 0.5 of a mill to fund the two construction projects. A second ballot request seeks 1.5 mills for 20 years for more jail staff and prevention programs.
The two requests would raise the average annual residential property-tax bill about $99 -- $25 for the half-mill levy and $74 for the 1.5-mill request.
Wilson's group opposes the larger tax request and is neutral on the construction tax levy.
"The fact that the construction of the juvenile home is lumped together with the jail, which is less necessary, that's why we're staying neutral on it," Wilson said.
Wilson questions why the county didn't propose the juvenile-home request and the jail proposal as two separate ballot requests. In 2002, a $148 million proposal to build a criminal-justice complex, which included a new juvenile home, jail and court facilities, was soundly rejected by voters.
County Administrator Don Gilmer said a new juvenile home and jail expansion are "absolute needs" and that he hasn't heard from many people who say they are for one project but not the other.
"If the voters say, 'No, we don't like it,' then the board would have to look at separating them," Gilmer said.
The juvenile facility is plagued by poor plumbing and air-conditioning systems, occasional cockroach and ant infestations and asbestos. A recent attempt to replace worn-out hallway carpeting was halted when workers pulling up the carpet also pulled up asbestos-backed tiles underneath.
The carpet was put back down and duct-taped into place.
During a recent staff meeting, one staffer mentioned that a shower in a residential area was so bad a plumber said he would have to turn off the water to the entire facility in order to repair it.

"Given the conditions here, these guys do an amazing job," said Joe Gazelloni, juvenile justice specialist with the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Structured environment

During youngsters' detention at the facility, the focus is on turning juvenile delinquents into productive members of society.

Youngsters may learn how to properly brush their teeth or to use a fork, said Peter Holt, juvenile-home program manager. The children are required to address staff as Mister or Miss and to say "please" and "thank you."

The youths have a structured environment while in the facility -- up at 7 a.m. every day, with specific times for meals, cleaning up their rooms, gym, school classes, courses in personal hygiene and living skills, and group-project work. Lights are out at 8:30 p.m.

"We try to keep the kids busy, engaged," Holt said. "The last thing we want is them sitting in their rooms."

The youngsters' rooms are whitewashed cinderblock rectangles measuring 9 feet by 7 feet, with wire-mesh windows at one end and steel doors with observation windows at the other. The only furniture is a bed frame with a mattress, pillow and blanket.

An outdoor courtyard is stark. Picnic tables under a tented awning give the children a spot for some activities, but it's surrounded by high walls.

Space is at a premium. Kids visit parents or caseworkers in a vacated courtroom, with those meetings sometimes moving to an employee break room.

"I've got educational programs here in this old side (of the facility) that was built in 1936 and I'm putting eight kids in a classroom that was originally designed as a sleeping room for two," said Frank Weichlein, superintendent of the juvenile home. "We have had to add a pump system to this place to keep the water flowing through the pipes because they are so constricted."

"It's not conducive to programming to our kids," Weichlein said, "and I'm stressing our kids, because they belong to the community."

Plans for the future

If the construction tax passes, Weichlein has plans.

"I can do 64 beds with no additional staffing," he said. "It would require a reallocation of staff, and some of the kids we're now placing in residential treatment all over the country would be able to stay here."

Weichlein envisions using 40 beds for detention, as is done now, with another 16 dedicated to rehabilitation programming -- "the kind of thing we're sending kids away for," he said. That could include mental-health treatment or sex-offender therapy.

The other eight beds could be "flex beds," he said. When police pick up a youngster for a crime, the juvenile-home staff could provide an assessment at that point and provide a place for the child to stay. Currently, police usually have to locate a relative to take the child because there is no room at the juvenile home. The beds could also be used if there was an overflow in the number of detention beds.

"If we had those treatment beds, we could do a better job in rehabilitating these kids and meeting their needs," Weichlein said. "It would be a safer environment than what I have right now for staff and residents."

Additional beds at the juvenile home would allow staff to do a better job of separating kids with different criminal histories, Weichlein said. Now first-time offenders at the home can associate with hardened delinquents, and violent youths and young sex offenders are not separated from other youngsters.

"Right now our physical plant does not allow for classification and separation of residents," he said.
The cost to keep a youngster in the juvenile home totals about $218 per day; costs per bed could go down with a newer building that requires less maintenance, Weichlein said.
"This building is old, it's antiquated and it's falling apart," he said. "I tease Sheriff (Michael) Anderson because his jail was built in 1972. But my new side was opened in 1966."

Gazette staff writer Cedric Ricks contributed to this report. He can be reached at 388-8557 or cricks@kalamazoogazette.com.

Jul 9, 5:53 PM EDT

Child insurance program may face crunch

By KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) -- A government program that provides health insurance for poor children could run into money problems in several states over the next two years unless Congress acts.

Six to 14 states will use up their share of federal money for the State Children's Health Insurance Program during the 2006 budget year, according to a report by the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service. By the next year, that number will range from 12 to 20 states.

The range occurs because analysts looked at two scenarios. One projected low demand for the program; the second factored in high demand.

Once states spend their federal share, they either have to use more of their own money to provide insurance coverage or find ways to reduce expenses by cutting services. Neither is a particularly attractive option for state legislatures.

Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., said on Friday that he planned legislation that would seek to add $1 billion to the program, known as SCHIP. The money had been allocated, he said, but was not spent by a deadline, so it reverted to the treasury on Sept. 30.

"It is unconscionable that children will go without health care because funds meant for the SCHIP program were not kept in the program," Kennedy said.

The program, created in 1997, now serves about 6.1 million people who would not otherwise have health insurance. Enrollment has increased steadily, though the pace has begun to slow in the past year.

Congress could address the problem in a few ways.

Lawmakers could give the program more money, as Kennedy wants. They also could change the formula used to distribute the money; this would help some states but hurt others.

Some lawmakers, such as the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, appear to favor the latter option.

"Part of the solution might be to make sure the money that's already in the system is directed to where it's needed and will be used," said Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa. His committee has jurisdiction over the program.

Congress could let the states that are spending more than their federal share face the consequences of that spending on their own, the research service noted.

The children in the health insurance program typically come from families whose income is too much to qualify for Medicaid but who cannot afford private health insurance.

When lawmakers created the program, they set aside $40 billion over 10 years. Most states have been unable to spend their share, which was particularly true in the program's earliest years.

After three years, states must return any unspent federal dollars so the money can go to states that have used up their federal share.

So far, the redistribution has prevented any widespread shortfalls. Only Rhode Island has exhausted all of its federal money coming through the program.

Soon, however, the redistribution will not be enough to cover the shortfalls in some states. That is because the pool of unspent money is shrinking as the program takes hold and enrollment expands, according to the report.

In 2006, Congress will appropriate about $4.1 billion to the program. But the projected demand for federal money will range from $5 billion to $6 billion.

In the next budget year, Congress will appropriate $5 billion. Demand, though, probably will be $5.4 billion and $6.8 billion, the report said.

"Although the SCHIP program has been successful in covering millions of uninsured children, and has therefore been politically popular, some states are poised to exhaust their federal funds as early as next fiscal year. If Congress decides to prevent these shortfalls, legislative action will be needed," the report said.

Ron Pollack, the executive director of Families USA, said he hopes the program's bipartisan support in Congress would lead to an expansion.

"I don't know of any Republicans or Democrats who don't like the program," he said. "I think they all like it."

With a budget deficit for the year projected near $350 billion, many lawmakers have little appetite for expanding any government program.

Pollack said tinkering with the distribution formula, as Grassley suggests, is not something he opposes. In the end, he said, Congress will have to put more money into the program if it hopes to meet demand.

"Remember, there are 6 million children eligible for this program who are not getting it," he said. "We want to get them enrolled."

On the Net:

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services: http://www.cms.hhs.gov/schip/

New anti-spammer law will help protect youth Parents can curb inappropriate messages

Ann Arbor News Editorial

Sunday, July 10, 2005

Long gone are the days when parents could simply screen what they considered inappropriate messages directed at their kids through the phone or the mail. Today, they have to resign themselves to the worrisome fact that those messages are getting to their children through e-mail, faxes and other high-tech conveyances.

The messages often center on pornography, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, gambling, fireworks, firearms or just about anything kids are banned by law from having.

Beginning in August, however, parents in Michigan can block much of that information from making its way to their children.

What's said to be the first example of a state law aimed at keeping spammers from sending inappropriate high-tech messages to youth won't, even some of its backers concede, keep all inappropriate subject matter from kids.

Anti-spam efforts like the one pushed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm have been difficult to enforce, with many commercial e-mailers either not knowing about the laws or several others working hard to skirt them.

But the prospect of some purveyors of contraband messages continuing their operations is no reason not to embrace Michigan's new anti-spammer law, as some critics have suggested. It is incumbent on the state, though, to get the word out to both parents and commercial and other e-mailers about the law, and its reach.

Parents and schools will be able to register free-of-charge the kids' e-mail addresses, mobile phone numbers, pager numbers and other contact information with the state. The information will be encrypted, so no one will be able to discover what the childs' actual addresses are, including the Chicago company handling the data base.

E-mailers who nevertheless persist in sending the banned information to children can face up to three years in jail or fines up to $30,000. Civil penalties up to $5,000 per message sent also can be assessed. The state attorney general's office will handle complaints.

For more information, log onto www.michigan.gov/protectmichild

Michigan Report

July 8, 2005

FEDERAL SEX LAWS PROPOSED: Several U.S.

Representatives have collaborated on a 13-bill package entitled the "Children's Safety Act of 2005," which would do many of the same things as Michigan's Student Safety Initiative in keeping children away from sex offenders.

The bills will be discussed later this month. They would expand the list of offenses and increase duration of registration requirements, create a new penalty for those who fail to comply with requirements, require all states to have a public registry, expand use of DNA to solve sex crimes, protect foster children from sexual abuse and increase penalties for those convicted of sex crimes against children.

The Children's Safety Act was drafted in response to the attacks on Jessica Lunsford, Sarah Lunde and Jetseta Gage, who were all killed by sex offenders. The U.S. House Judiciary Committee held three hearings on the bills before drafting the 13 bipartisan bills.

MICHIGAN TO JOIN NATIONAL REGISTRY:

Michigan will add its name to the 20 states joining the National Sex Offender Registry in order to keep track of sex offenders from other states that enter Michigan, Governor Jennifer Granholm announced Friday.

The database will link state sex offender registries to become a one-stop location for interested residents to look up names of offenders. 20 states are expected to join the registry, with more coming later this year. The service will be free and available August 1.

MIRS
July 8, 2005

MI Goes With National Sex Offender Registry

Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** today announced that Michigan would be joining in the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) National Sex Offender Public Registry (NSOPR) to give state residents a new tool to help protect their children.

The registry will use the DOJ's computer savvy to link each state and territory public sex offender registry.

"As sex offenders move from state to state, we must ensure that we are using every available technology to track them," Granholm said. "This national registry will help protect Michigan children from anyone who might enter this state with intent to do harm."

The DOJ reports that as sex offenders move across state lines, providing access to offender information beyond one's own state increases the likelihood of identifying sex offenders in the area. The new NSOPR will allow concerned parents, grandparents, neighbors and friends to conduct a single search to identify sex offenders nationwide. To receive the same information now, a user would have to access each state's registry.

Monday, July 11, 2005

Caregivers help aging seniors remain in their own homes

More families turn to nonmedical services to help elderly relatives handle everyday tasks.

By Eileen Alt Powell / Associated Press

NEW YORK -- Like many of today's seniors, Catherine Lewis wants to stay in her own home as long as possible. But a fall several years ago almost ended that dream.

"She wasn't responding to physical therapy, she was having trouble moving around," says daughter Cathy Seaver of her 84-year-old mother. "I was very concerned."

The solution was to hire caregivers who visit Lewis' home in Greensboro, N.C., for several hours every day. They help her bathe, take a short walk, eat a hot lunch -- even put together the snacks for her monthly bridge club gathering.

"If not for them, I would have ended up in assisted living," Lewis says. "This way, I can still enjoy my home, my neighborhood, my friends. I'm spoiled to death."

Lewis and Seaver are among a growing number of families who are turning to agencies that provide services such as light housecleaning, grocery shopping, meal preparation and companionship aimed at keeping seniors healthy -- and independent -- as they age.

The National Private Duty Association, an alliance of for-profit and not-for-profit caregiving agencies based in Indianapolis, has grown to nearly 700 members from just 30 three years ago, according to Sheila McMackin, the group's president. Nearly three-quarters of the members specialize in nonmedical in-home care, she said.

"A lot of trends have converged," said McMackin, a social worker who runs the Wellspring Personal Care service in Chicago. "People are living longer, they're staying healthier ... and they're saying, 'I want to stay in my home.'"

Paul Hogan founded Home Instead Senior Care in Omaha, Neb., in the late 1990s after watching his family struggle to care for his grandmother.

"Our typical client is between the ages of 75 and 85," Hogan said. "Two-thirds are women, most of them living alone."

On average, caregivers spend about 15 hours a week with each senior at a cost of about $1,000 a month. Most of the seniors pay for the services themselves, although in some cases children chip in, he said.

Hogan believes Home Instead services help the elderly thrive.

"If we didn't exist, there would be a lot of seniors that would do nothing," he said. "Based on what family members tell us, they're certain that because of our services their mother or father lived a lot longer -- and had a much better quality of life."

Cheryl Denney, a supervisory staff attorney with the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, said that Home Instead services greatly reduced the stress of dealing with her mother, Sue Denney, who is 86 and has Alzheimer's disease.

"Mother was getting confused," Denney said.

"She was calling me 25, maybe 30, times a day at work, at home. She didn't remember she had just called me. Sometimes she didn't remember why she was calling."

Denney said her mother resisted hiring help, "because, I think, she felt it would reduce her independence."

Her mother relented, and now a Home Instead caregiver helps her mother dress, keeps track of medications and makes sure she eats her meals. They tidy up the house together, work in the garden and go for mile-long walks in the park.

The frantic phone calls have stopped, said Denney. "It's given her her life back, and me mine." Some seniors need help for just a short time, to bridge a crisis, said Sherry W. Jerome, senior director of elder care services at the nonprofit Sheltering Arms Senior Services in Houston.

"Doctors are doing a lot of outpatient surgeries, as opposed to putting the senior in the hospital, and they often need help for a while after they're released," Jerome said.

Sheltering Arms provides in-home services for about $13 to $18 an hour, and some state and local funding is available to subsidize the costs for low-income families.

Sheltering Arms and other agencies also provide long-term assistance, often for elderly couples.

"We often see an elder spouse struggling to take care of an ill spouse," said Lanette Gonzales, vice president for home care services at Sheltering Arms.

"Lifting a person out of bed, moving them to a chair, helping them into the tub, that can be just too much," she said.

Madeline Bunjes, of Houston, turned to Sheltering Arms after her husband, Emil, suffered a heart attack and debilitating stroke several years ago.

Sheltering Arms caregivers spend 12 hours a day with him, Monday through Friday, helping him bathe, getting him up on his walker and taking him outside on his motorized wheelchair.

A Drug Scourge Creates Its Own Form of Orphan

By KATE ZERNIKE The New York Times
Published: July 11, 2005

TULSA, Okla., July 8 - The Laura Dester Shelter here is licensed for 38 children, but at times in the past months it has housed 90, forcing siblings to double up in cots. It is supposed to be a 24-hour stopping point between troubled homes and foster care, but with foster homes backed up, children are staying weeks and sometimes months, making it more orphanage than shelter, a cacophony of need.

In a rocking chair, a volunteer uses one arm to feed a 5-day-old boy taken from his mother at birth, the other to placate a toddler who is wandering from adult to adult begging, "Bottle?" A 3-year-old who arrived at dawn shrieks as salve is rubbed on her to kill the lice.

This is a problem methamphetamine has made, a scene increasingly familiar across the country as the number of foster children rises rapidly in states hit hard by the drug, the overwhelming number of them, officials say, taken from parents who were using or making methamphetamine. Oklahoma last year became the first state to ban over-the-counter sales of cold medicines that contain the crucial ingredient needed to make methamphetamine. Even so, the number of foster children in the state is up 16 percent from a year ago. In Kentucky, the numbers are up 12 percent, or 753 children, with only seven new homes.

In Oregon, 5,515 children entered the system in 2004, up from 4,946 the year before, and officials there say the caseload would be half what it is now if the methamphetamine problem suddenly went away. In Tennessee, state officials recently began tracking the number of children brought in because of methamphetamine, and it rose to 700 in 2004 from 400 in 2003.

While foster populations in cities rose because of so-called crack babies in the 1990's, methamphetamine is mostly a rural phenomenon, and it has created virtual orphans in areas without social service networks to support them. in Muskogee, an hour's drive south of here, a group is raising money to convert an old church into a shelter because there are none.

Officials say methamphetamine's particularly potent and destructive nature and the way it is often made in the home conspire against child welfare unlike any other drug.

It has become harder to attract and keep foster parents because the children of methamphetamine arrive with so many behavioral problems; they may not get into their beds at night because they are so used to sleeping on the floor, and they may resist toilet training because they are used to wearing dirty diapers.

"We used to think, you give these kids a good home and lots of love and they'll be O.K.," said Esther Rider-Salem, the manager of Child Protective Services programs for the State of Oklahoma. "This goes above and beyond anything we've seen."

Although the methamphetamine problem has existed for years, state officials here and elsewhere say the number of foster children created by it has spiked in the last year or two as growing awareness of the drug problem has prompted more lab raids, and more citizens reporting suspected methamphetamine use.

Nationwide, the Drug Enforcement Administration says that over the last five years 15,000 children were found at laboratories where methamphetamine was made. But that number vastly understates the problem, federal officials say, because it does not include children whose parents use methamphetamine but do not make it and because it relies on state reporting, which can be spotty.

On July 5, the National Association of Counties reported that 40 percent of child welfare officials surveyed nationwide said that methamphetamine had caused a rise in the number of children removed from homes.

The percentage was far higher on the West Coast and in rural areas, where the drug has hit the hardest. Seventy-one percent of counties in California, 70 percent in Colorado and 69 percent in Minnesota reported an increase in the number of children removed from homes because of methamphetamine.

In North Dakota, 54 percent of counties reported a methamphetamine-related increase. At what was billed as a "community meeting on meth" in Fargo this year, the state attorney general, Wayne Stenehjem, exhorted the hundreds of people packed into an auditorium: "People always ask, what can they do about meth? The most important thing you can do is become a foster parent, because we're just seeing so many kids being taken from these homes."

Officials also say methamphetamine has made it harder to reunite families once the child is taken; 59 percent of those surveyed in the national counties study agreed.

The federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, enacted as babies born to crack users were crowding foster care, requires states to begin terminating parental rights if a child has spent 15 out of 22 months in foster care. It was intended to keep children from languishing in foster homes. But rehabilitation for methamphetamine often takes longer than other drugs, and parents fall behind the clock.

"Termination of parental rights almost becomes the regular piece," said Jerry Foxhoven, the administrator of the Child Advocacy Board in Iowa. "We know pretty early that these families are not going to get back together."

The drug - smoked, ingested or injected - is synthetic, cheap and easy to make in home labs using pseudoephedrine, the ingredient in many cold medicines, and common fertilizers, solvents or battery acid. The materials are dangerous, and highly explosive.

"Meth adds this element of parents who think they are rocket scientists and want to cook these chemicals in the kitchen," said Yvonne Glick, a lawyer at the Department of Human Services in Oklahoma who works with the state's alliance for drug endangered children. "They're on the couch watching their stuff cook, and the kids are on the floor watching them."

The drug also produces a tremendous and long-lasting rush, with intense sexual desire. As a result of the sexual binges, some child welfare officials say, methamphetamine users are having more children. More young children are entering the foster system, often as newborns suffering from the effects of their mother's use of the drug.

Oklahoma was recently chosen to participate in a federally financed study of the effects of methamphetamine on babies born to addicted mothers. Doctors who work with them have already found that the babies are born with trouble suckling or bonding with their parents, who often abuse the children out of frustration.

But the biggest problem, doctors who work with children say, is not with those born under the effects of the drug but with the children who grow up surrounded by methamphetamine and its attendant problems. Because users are so highly sexualized, the children are often exposed to pornography or sexual abuse, or watch their mothers prostitute themselves, the welfare workers say.

The drug binges tend to last for days or weeks, and the crash is tremendous, leaving children unwashed and unfed for days as parents fall into a deep sleep.

"The oldest kid becomes the parent, and the oldest kid may be 4 or 5 years old," said Dr. Mike Stratton, a pediatrician in Muskogee, Okla., who is involved with a state program for children exposed to drugs that is run in conjunction with the Justice Department. "The parents are basically worthless, when they're not stoned they're sleeping it off, when they're not sleeping they don't eat, and it's not in their regimen to feed the kids."

Ms. Glick recalls a group of siblings found eating plaster at a home filled with methamphetamine. The oldest, age 6, was given a hamburger when they arrived at the Laura Dester Shelter; he broke it apart and handed out bits to his siblings before taking a bite himself.

Jay Wurscher, director of alcohol and drug services for the children and families division of the Oregon Department of Human Services, said, "In every way, shape and form, this is the worst drug ever for child welfare."

Child welfare workers say they used to remove children as a last resort, first trying to help with services in the home.

But everywhere there are reminders of the dangers of leaving children in homes with methamphetamine. In one recent case here, an 18-month-old child fell onto a heating unit on the floor and died while the parents slept; a 3-year-old sibling had tried to rouse them.

The police who raid methamphetamine labs say they try to leave the children with relatives, particularly in rural areas, where there are few other options.

But it has become increasingly clear, they say, that often the relatives, too, are cooking or using methamphetamine. And because the problem has hit areas where there are so few shelters, children are often placed far from their parents. Caseworkers have to drive children long distances to where parents are living or imprisoned for visits; Leslie Beyer, a caseworker at Laura Dester, logged 3,600 miles on her car one month.

The drain of the cases is forcing foster families to leave the system, or caseworkers to quit. In some counties in Oklahoma, Ms. Rider-Salem said, half the caseworkers now leave within two years.

After the ban on over-the-counter pseudoephedrine was enacted - a law other states are trying to emulate - the number of children taken out of methamphetamine labs and into the foster care system in Oklahoma declined by about 15 percent, Ms. Glick said. But she said the number of children found not in the labs but with parents who were using the drug had more than compensated for any decline.

The state's only other children's shelter, in Oklahoma City, was so crowded recently that the fire marshal threatened to shut it down, forcing the state to send children to foster families in far-flung counties.

At Laura Dester, three new children arrived on one recent morning, the 3-year-old being treated for lice and two siblings, found playing in an abandoned house while their mother was passed out at home. The girl now wanders with a plastic bag over her hair to keep the lice salve from leaking. She hugs her little brother, then grabs a plastic toy phone out of his hand, leaving him wailing.

"Who's on the phone?" asks Kay Saunders, the assistant director at the shelter, gently trying to intervene.

"My mom," the girl says, then turns to her little brother. "It's ringing!"

Health

Lunch doesn't fill hunger gap

Only a small fraction of Michigan children participate in the free summer meal programs.

By Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News
Sunday
July 10, 2005

Whoever said there's no such thing as a free lunch hasn't been to Pepper Road Baseball Field in Ecorse, Gethsemane Baptist Church in Westland or hundreds of other parks, nonprofit organizations and schools across Michigan that offer a free summer lunch program.

"It was very good," said 12-year-old Niesia Reyes of Detroit, who ate a piece of pizza, vegetable medley, applesauce and milk during lunch at the National Youth Sports Program at University of Detroit Mercy.

The state's summer lunch program recently kicked off after the school year ended, but only 9 percent of the 422,000 children eligible are participating due to a lack of awareness and sponsors for neighborhood lunch sites, program officials said. Most glaring is the lack of participation and sponsors in Wayne County, where the need is among the greatest in the state because of the concentration of poverty. State officials and community advocates are working to remedy the problem but acknowledge more needs to be done.

"Many families rely on the meal program in school (during the year) and in the summer months, those kids aren't in any less of a need of a healthy meal," said Bridget Nelson, a hunger advocate from Birmingham.

Funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the summer lunch program is an extension of the National School Lunch Program that provides millions of free and reduced nutritious meals to low-income Michigan children during the school year. This is a program many families depend on to feed their children, but it ends when school lets out for summer.

Enter the Summer Food Service Program, which is offered at a variety of community sites from late June through August, and can be found in apartment complexes, at summer camps and even in places as nondescript as parking lots.

The intent of the program is to provide at least one well-balanced meal a day in the summer so kids can stay nourished and be ready to go back to school and learn in the fall. It also gives some budget relief to low-income families in the summer.

"It saves Mom some time, and the smoke detector doesn't go off," joked Jamie Damron, who walks with her mother and brother to the Pepper Road Baseball Field in Ecorse every day during the week to get a free sandwich.

A recent report by the Food Research and Action Center showed that Michigan kids' participation rate fell 10 percent between the summers of 2003 and 2004: During July 2003, 40,000 children participated while last summer only 36,000 participated.

During the same time period, the number of sites available for children to access the summer lunch program fell by 12 percent: Between summer 2003 and 2004, the number of sites where children could get a free lunch declined from 813 to 718.

These numbers placed Michigan in the bottom 10 states with the least positive change to its summer food program from 2003-04, according to the Food Research and Action Center.

Even more distressing to food advocates is the lack of sites and participation throughout Wayne County, especially in Detroit. There are some neighborhoods in Detroit that do not offer places where kids can get a free lunch.

Throughout Wayne County, there are also neighborhoods that would qualify for a site and could support one. Oakland and Macomb counties could also bolster participation of children at existing sites and expand into communities where there is a high need, said Gloria Zunker, consultant for the statewide program at the Michigan Department of Education.

The specific neighborhoods without a lunch site but that could support one are not completely clear since the state only this year began administrating the summer lunch program.

The program has been administered the previous 20 years by a regional USDA office in Chicago. Work is under way to map this year's lunch sites and areas of need so officials can discern where eligible neighborhoods are not being served.

Meanwhile, local and state officials are working on ratcheting up participation, and more sponsors, which can be any grassroots group interested in administering the program during the summer.

They are also contacting school districts in underserved areas, and working with nonprofits that want to start out small and expand, such as Gleaners Community Food Bank.

To encourage more sponsors, the Michigan Department of Education program has streamlined and reduced paperwork.

To increase participation, the department has put up a Web site so parents can find out where there is a location nearest them serving the free lunches.

It has also presented the information to various groups serving children, and sent out mass mailings.

Participation is paramount, Zunker said, because the sites can be located all over the community, but it won't matter if nobody comes.

"We are making strides and we are increasing our sites in areas of need, and hopefully that will continue to increase," Zunker said. "We are increasing access to the program, but there is more work to be done and we will continue on that effort."

Mayor's Time, a nonprofit organization working to enhance the health and safety of children in Detroit, has assisted the Detroit Department of Health and Wellness to do a massive grassroots outreach since the health department is the primary sponsor in Detroit.

Mayor's Time officials have contacted more than 800 after-school programs in Detroit and several hundred faith-based groups to see if they would be a feeding site, or at least spread the word to kids that the summer food program is available.

"We're making some progress, and we have a number of new feeding sites," said Linda Lee, spokesman for Mayor's Time. "But we are still working."

The Detroit Department of Health and Wellness Promotion, which began a summer breakfast program this year, reports that outreach efforts are paying off. But there is still more to be done, said Sharon Quincy of the Detroit Department of Health and Wellness.

"If our sites were at capacity, we would be doing well," she said.

If more children were as adventurous as Jessica Johnson and as supportive as her aunt, Allison Stauder, then summer lunch programs might grow more.

Johnson, 11, recently went to get a free lunch for the first time at Pepper Road Baseball Field in Ecorse. She had wanted to go for a while but didn't want to go by herself. So Stauder went with her.

"I told her, 'Go on up there. I'll go with you,'" said Stauder. "A free lunch is a free lunch."

Free summer lunch

Participation in the Michigan Summer Food Service Program, which offers a free lunch to eligible kids, is declining throughout the state.

	JULY		Percent
SERVICE	2003	2004	change
Children	40,278	36,219	-10.1%
Sponsors	114	106	-7%
Sites	813	718	-11.7%

Source: Food Research and Action Center

The Detroit News

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Your Opinions

Battle Creek Enquirer

July 11, 2005

Equalize rights for parents

I am writing this hoping to bring public the need for change in existing legislation like the Violence Against Women Act and S105 and HR 240 Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act of 2005 and the problem of children not being awarded equal parenting time with both of their parents and no equality in the responsibility of supporting children.

About 70-80 percent of women have sole custody of children with the fathers being part-time visitors. Joint physical custody should be the law first and foremost unless there is cause otherwise. Federal programs should reward states that have education programs that emphasize the equal importance of both parents and laws that increase the amount of fathers who have joint physical custody with equal numbers of sole custody fathers vs. mothers.

Tax laws should be based on the amount of time either parent has them, not on custody. A large number of non-custodial parents pay the majority of the money that is spent on their children and pay the majority of taxes, but with no or little tax relief.

There also should be a more equitable approach by the state in formulating child support and child care programs. These programs should remove the disincentive for parents to increase their earnings by formulating programs that do not focus on incomes but rather focus on true economic conditions of raising children. Refer to the state's foster care system that has set amounts for support based on age and need of the children involved.

All laws should be gender neutral with no one sex getting more rights then the other. The Department of Justice reports that 36 percent or 835,000 of the 2.3 million victims of domestic violence are male victims. The 14th Amendment trumps special interest gender politics.

Darrick Scott-Farnsworth
Augusta

Unger case again on hold

Both sides plan to challenge judge's ruling

July 9, 2005

BY FRANK WITSIL
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Neither the defense nor the prosecution was satisfied Friday with a Benzie County judge's ruling that Mark Unger of Huntington Woods must face second-degree -- not first-degree -- murder charges in the death of his wife, Florence Unger.

The defense said 85th District Judge Brent Danielson should not have bound over the case for trial and took issue with some of the judge's findings.

The prosecution wants the original charge, first-degree murder, reinstated.

Bottom line: More delays in the oft-delayed case.

Nearly two years after 37-year-old Florence Unger's body was found floating in Lower Herring Lake after a fall from a 12-foot deck onto a concrete slab, no trial date has been set.

Both sides now plan to challenge the judge's ruling in circuit court.

Allison Pierce, a spokeswoman for Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox, said Friday that prosecutors hope a circuit judge will reverse Danielson's decision to exclude testimony indicating that Florence Unger was deliberately drowned. That would open the door for a first-degree murder charge.

In his Thursday ruling, Danielson said he excluded Oakland County Medical Examiner L.J. Dragovic's testimony about drowning because his conclusions were not generally accepted by his peers or based on scientific methodology. Without it, prosecutors could not prove that the death was premeditated.

Mark Unger could face up to life in prison if convicted of either charge.

Defense attorney Robert Harrison, who unsuccessfully sought to dismiss the case, argued there is no evidence to establish that Florence Unger's death was a homicide. He said it could have been an accident.

From the start, Mark Unger, 44, has said he is innocent.

While Danielson said much of the evidence presented could be interpreted to support arguments from either side, one piece of evidence convinced him to bind over the case: Florence Unger's body had been moved from the concrete slab into the water of the northern Michigan lake.

Danielson's ruling notes that the body might have been moved "in a clumsy effort to make it falsely appear that she had fallen in an accident and to conceal criminal conduct" or "to make certain that she did not recover from the injury."

Either way, Danielson concluded, he "can imagine no circumstances under which her body was moved to the water for an innocent reason."

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